

**MASS CALL SPEECH 2012
PRESIDENT OF LAW SOCIETY**

May it please Your Honour. I speak on behalf of the Law Society to welcome the cohort of 2011 to the Singapore Bar.

Today is a very special day. After four long years of slogging (never mind about the earlier heartbreaks in school and JC), and a stint in post-graduate, you are today to be admitted as lawyers. Your parents' sacrifices have paid off, and dreams are being realised. You have done your parents proud. Today is indeed a day to be celebrated and enjoyed. So I congratulate all of you and your parents.

But today is also the day you irrevocably lose your innocence. When you were students, excuses could be made for your mistakes. When you were trainees, your masters were there to mentor you and perhaps take the rap for you. However, from today, you are on your own. An understanding employer may still take your mistakes kindly, but not many clients will do so. So what can you do?

Frankly there is no short-cut to being a successful professional. Hard work, attention to details, and an awareness of what is right and wrong are still the key ingredients to your new way of life. Intelligence in itself is not enough. Cleverness will only get you into trouble if your moral compass is not there. And always remember that when you get into trouble it is not only you who suffer, but also your loved ones, especially your parents. So even if you will not want to do right for yourself, please do right for your parents.

I do apologise for this rather grim message on this happy occasion. But the world has changed. Greed has become the by-word for many things. Look at the recent exposure on the LIBOR manipulation. The emails that passed between the perpetrators showed a total lack of morality, a total lack of concern about being caught out. It was almost a "master of the world" attitude. It was also frighteningly ordinary! As you get involved in big deals and cases, it is sometimes difficult to avoid such hubris. And there will always be client pressure to make the deal work, to win the case, or whatever. There will also be employer pressure to turn in ever greater revenues. But you have to decide where the line is to be drawn.

The pressure is likely to get even greater as the global economic situation worsens. You will read many analyst reports which will say that the situation is improving. But is that believable? If you have not been reading the newspapers and other news media, please do so. You need to keep abreast of what is going on in the rest of the world. You cannot be a

good lawyer if you do not know what is going on around you. And if the situation really worsens, some of you may even lose your jobs.

And that brings me to the present job situation. I understand that the larger firms have taken a rather conservative view of the job market. There has been a drop in hiring of new lawyers. So fewer trainees have been taken on compared to previous years. Some of you have had to move on to lesser known firms, or take on in-house jobs. But I am told that some of you will not take on jobs in the smaller firms. Whether this is a right decision for you, I cannot say. But please bear in mind that the job market may get tighter in the next 12 months.

Remember also that out of roughly every 5 lawyers practising in Singapore, one is a foreign lawyer. So the competition for jobs and for deals will be tougher. In an attempt to understand the situation better, and to assist young lawyers, the Law Society recently sent out a survey form to all of you regarding your training experience and your employment status. Unfortunately only 127 of you have responded to this survey. Frankly this is not a good start. The responses are meant to help the Law Society have a better understanding of the situation. So for those who have not responded, I ask that you do soon. Your responses will remain anonymous, and hopefully it will help us to help you and others in later years.

But despite all the pressures on you, I hope you will have time to participate in a time-honoured activity of the legal profession: pro bono work. We strongly encourage you to make your contribution to society as a lawyer. To mark the occasion of this Mass Call, we have published a special supplement to the Singapore Law Gazette called The Power of One which features a theme on pro bono. It includes articles on how rewarding pro bono work can be, and how it can go hand-in-hand with a fledging legal career.

I would like to end this speech on a more positive note: To welcome you to the Bar, the Law Society is hosting a reception for you and your parents after this ceremony. There is a photo booth and we have also prepared a welcome gift for you. So please remember to collect your goodie bag with the photo booth voucher at the Law Society's booth. Congratulations once again.